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SUBJECT: Media Reaction - Foreign Minister Carl Bildt op-ed

I. On January 2, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt outlined the foreign policy challenges and priorities for Sweden in 2009 in the independent liberal Stockholm morning daily "Dagens Nyheter":

"At the same time that we have now entered our 'European year'- our participation in the EU troika during the first half of the year, the elections to European Parliament in June and then our chairmanship of the EU until the turn of the year - there is reason to conclude that we live in a less stable and less sure world than we thought only a year ago.

And that makes the challenges that we face in foreign affairs considerable....

"2009 will be Sweden's big European year. Already, starting yesterday, we are a part of the so-called troika, under Czech leadership, that steers the European Union....

"A lot of things are on the EU's internal list - elections to the European Parliament, a new European Commission and a new referendum in Ireland about the important Lisbon treaty - but it is important that we do not let the internal agenda dominate. Europe's citizens want policies that are about real problems....

"At the same time we must continue to develop our more robust instruments of peace.

"The interventions in Chad succeeded in protecting refugees and prevent the broadening of the war in Darfur, and now the EU has launched its first maritime operation to protect food transports and combat piracy in Somali waters....

"But even more important - and more difficult - is the nation building efforts that today demand our resources in Kosovo and Afghanistan and that tomorrow - hopefully! - will do so in Palestine. With its expanded arsenal of also civilian and economic tools, the EU will become an increasingly important actor here as well....

"Soon a U.S. administration with low credibility will be replaced by a new administration that - at least for a while - will be uniquely strong by the expectations that are tied to it....

"Few matters are more important in the coming year than to increase understanding between this new United States and the European Union. It is only through this partnership that we are able to take on the major global challenges - and commit other countries that are also decisive for the success.....

"Nothing would be more important than to prepare the ground for genuine peace between Israel and the entire Arab world, and joint efforts for a thriving Palestinian state. That this would open new both political and economic perspectives for the region as a whole is obvious....

"I am also convinced that such [an agenda] would also aid the possibility of handling the other difficult challenges we face in this wider region - as well as in the longer term fight the terrorist organizations whose evil we were once again reminded of through the Mumbai attacks."

